

Samson official named Wyoming oil-gas supervisor

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CASPER, Wyo. -- Wyoming's new head oil-and-gas official is a former Arkansas regulator and oil-and-gas company lobbyist.

The Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission on Friday selected Grant Black, 58, to helm the state's oil and gas regulatory body. Black will start May 1. The state will pay him a \$150,000 salary.

He said Friday from Tulsa, Okla., that he's excited to start work and has a lot to bring to the Cowboy State.

"Having the background I do, I feel like not only am I qualified, but I feel I can make a contribution to the industry and state of Wyoming," he said. "I'm really looking forward to it."

Leading the commission will not be Black's first regulatory job. After nearly two decades of work as an exploratory petroleum geologist, Black in 1999 accepted the directorship of the Arkansas Oil and Gas Commission, which serves the same purpose as Wyoming's commission.

Gov. Matt Mead, a member of the commission and active participant in the supervisor search, touted that experience in a prepared statement Friday.

"His track record in Arkansas doing this same job is an asset," Mead said. "Grant comes well recommended."

Black said Friday his time in Arkansas has given him an ability to consider all parties' input in making decisions surrounding the industry.

"Probably one of the most important things is to recognize there are a lot of people who are impacted and involved in the regulation of oil and gas," he said. "That ranges from a private landowner to a mineral owner to a sportsman. Being able to appreciate and consider all those stakeholders' positions is important."

During his time as director, Black also spearheaded rule changes which allowed oil-and-gas companies to install more wells per section. Horizontal drilling has since allowed many companies to do so in an affordable manner.

Black led the Arkansas commission for five years before accepting a position in 2004 as director of governmental affairs at Samson Resources, a company which also has several interests in Wyoming. He worked for Samson until December, when he was laid off.

Black said Friday he couldn't comment "in an educated manner" about some of the specific issues facing the commission, but said he's ready to start work. He has, in previous interviews with the Star-Tribune, declined to list some of his priorities, saying he plans to take on issues which the commission identifies as priorities.

Three other men interviewed for the position at Tuesday's meeting. The finalists included longtime commission employees Richard Marvel and Mark Watson, as well as Jesse Taylor, the founder of Colorado-based Remington Technologies, an environmental remediation company.

Interim supervisor Bob King had served since July after the resignation of Tom Doll.

Doll resigned that month in the wake of controversy caused by comments he made at an industry function. At a conference in Canada, Doll said landowners in the ongoing Pavillion water dispute were motivated by greed.

The commission began a search for a full-time supervisor in July, and nearly closed the process in November. A series of interviewees visited Cheyenne that month, and an applicant was offered the position but turned it down.

The commission in January supported legislation which eliminated a requirement that the state's supervisor be a licensed geologist or engineer in Wyoming. The bill, which was passed and signed into law, allowed the commission to interview and potentially offer the position to candidates who aren't from the state.

Mead thanked King and the commission in a Friday release.

"Bob has been a great leader and brought ideas to improve the commission," he said. "I also want to thank the other members of the commission who worked hard to find the right person for this job."

Read more: http://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming/samson-official-named-wyoming-oil-gas-supervisor/article_33d705a0-a6ad-5f14-8538-a0f1b272e07d.html#ixzz2NvaALJP1

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